

**Sri Lanka: Growing Concerns
About Tamil Terrorism**

Sri Lanka appears headed for a period of increased Tamil terrorist violence if President J. R. Jayewardene's newly reelected government does not soon resolve longstanding grievances of the minority Tamil community. Although violent incidents have tapered off in the weeks since local elections in May, tensions remain high, and another terrorist attack could set off a bruising communal confrontation.

The ever-present threat of communal violence is the Achilles heel of Sri Lanka's stability and national unity. Traditional animosities between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority (about 74 percent of the population) and the Tamil Hindu minority (about 13 percent)—which are based on religion, language, cultural identity, and numerous specific grievances—have flared into widespread, bloody confrontations in recent years. Since the mid-1970s the Tamil community has endeavored to establish an independent Tamil state (Eelam) in the northern and eastern provinces where Tamils predominate.

Tamil separatism poses a major challenge to Jayewardene's United National Party (UNP) government. Although Tamil terrorism is containable and does not threaten the government, it risks provoking Sinhalese overreaction and a wider conflict that could gather steam rapidly in this communally sensitive society. The recent spread of violence to Trincomalee has particularly worrisome implications because of the potentially volatile racial mixture in that city. Extensive communal unrest could seriously undermine the government's ambitious economic development programs, according to Jayewardene, and would frustrate the efforts of moderates on both sides to reach a constructive accommodation.

The Forces of Moderation

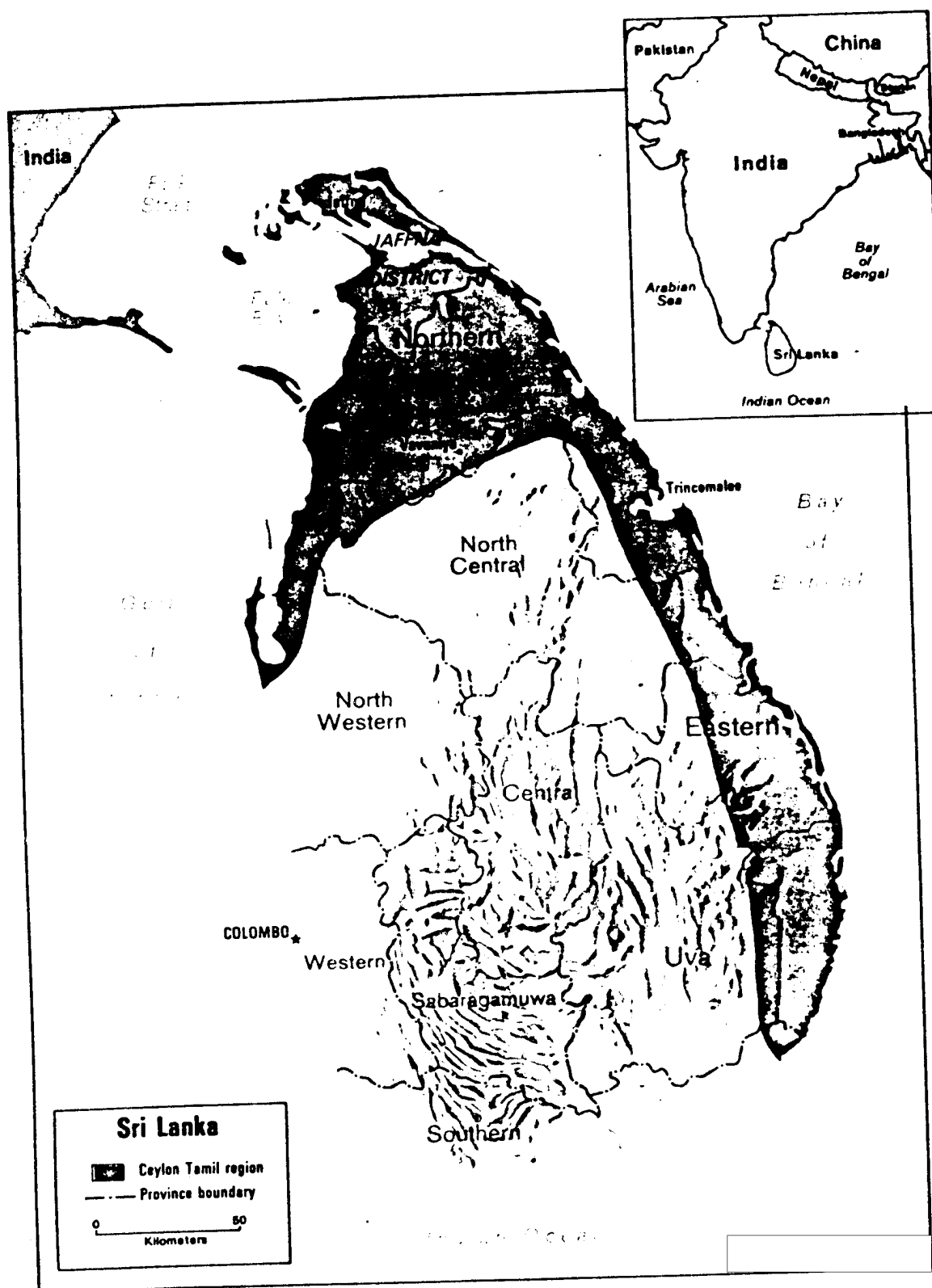
Jayewardene has long recognized the dangers posed by communal differences, and we believe he is deeply

committed to fostering better Tamil-Sinhalese relations. He is staunchly opposed to the idea of a separate Tamil state, but, unlike his predecessors, he has attempted to provide the Tamils with a greater voice in their own affairs. Working with the moderate leadership of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)—the major political spokesman for Tamil interests and the official opposition in parliament—Jayewardene set up a system of district development councils in 1981 to give the Tamils a measure of local autonomy. Later that year he also began a series of talks with TULF General Secretary Amirthalingam as a means of hearing Tamil grievances directly and reducing communal tensions. We believe these sessions strengthened Amirthalingam's position in appealing for moderate Tamil support.

Government promises, however, have not borne fruit. The district council system has never been adequately implemented. Talks with Amirthalingam were suspended indefinitely last fall when Jayewardene and his party were in the throes of a national election, and the government does not appear prepared to resume them.

The lack of progress has put the TULF in a vulnerable position. The party is caught between its commitment to work for an independent Eelam through nonviolent, constitutional means and its apparent recognition that no useful purpose would be served by launching a confrontation with the government. We believe that Amirthalingam's position as spokesman for moderate Tamil interests is being eroded by government inaction on Tamil issues and that many Tamils are shifting their support to more militant forces.

Secret



634720 7-83

Secret

25X1

Secret

Tamil Tigers

Tamil disaffection with the predominantly Sinhalese government erupted into terrorism in 1975. Since then a number of radical Tamil terrorist groups have sprung up, all ostensibly dedicated to dramatizing the cause of Eelam but mainly seeking to drive a wedge between moderate forces in both camps and preventing any compromise on Tamil demands. Because of the general anti-Sinhalese attitude within the Tamil community, popular support for these groups is difficult to measure, but, based on substantial evidence, we believe it is strongest in the Jaffna District in the far north [redacted]

The most notorious of these groups is the Tamil Tigers—an umbrella organization that contains a number of offshoots and rival factions. Estimates of Tiger strength vary, but we believe that hardcore members number between 100 and 200. Since their emergence, the Tigers have been credited with a number of highly publicized political assassinations and politically motivated bombings, as well as bank robberies and terrorist raids on police stations in search of cash and arms. Embassy and press reporting indicates that they receive material support, training, and sanctuary in Tamil-speaking areas of southern India, making them a difficult target for Sri Lankan security forces. [redacted]

The TULF has consistently condemned Tiger propaganda and violence, some of which has been directed at moderate Tamil politicians as a warning against dealing with the Colombo government. [redacted]

Tiger Effectiveness

Although the Tigers are usually given to random acts of violence, their tactical sophistication and effectiveness may be improving. The almost simultaneous assassinations of three UNP politicians in separate attacks on 29 April demonstrated an unusual degree of organization. [redacted] however, the Tigers continue to suffer from internal leadership struggles and factional rivalries that have occasionally erupted into debilitating internecine warfare. [redacted]

The Tigers waged an effective campaign in Jaffna against Tamil participation in local elections in May. Using a combination of propaganda and intimidation, they were able to force numerous candidates into withdrawing from the races and keep many voters away from the polls. Voter participation ranged from a high of 24 percent in the town of Jaffna to a low of less than 2 percent in outlying areas. The TULF leadership vowed to stay in the race, however, despite Tiger threats and, as expected, captured all of the local seats at stake. [redacted]

Government Security Measures

The government has employed a number of security measures to control Tiger violence, with varying degrees of success. Government powers of search, seizure, and preventive detention have been considerably strengthened through the Prevention of Terrorism Act—put into effect in 1979 for a one-year period and now extended indefinitely—and its liberal use of emergency powers as granted by the constitution. The imposition of a state of emergency immediately following local or national elections to head off communal and other postelection violence has become standard practice. The state of emergency imposed after local and parliamentary byelections in May was extended in late June for another month and may be lengthened further. [redacted]

As part of a new antiterrorism offensive, the government established a 500-member antiterrorism unit last May, and in June it suspended coroners' inquiries in a bid to strengthen the hand of security forces in [redacted]


ecret


Sri Lanka: Recent Terrorist Incidents

<i>2 April 1983</i>	<i>Tiger bombing of the government's district administrative center in Jaffna.</i>
<i>24 April</i>	<i>Gasoline bombs thrown at Jaffna Airport.</i>
<i>29 April</i>	<i>Terrorists kill three UNP politicians in separate attacks.</i>
<i>8 May</i>	<i>Tigers disrupt election rally in Jaffna by firing in the air and seizing a senior Tamil politician's official car.</i>
<i>9 May</i>	<i>Three bombs planted in Jaffna; all disarmed.</i>
<i>18 May</i>	<i>Bombs explode outside five polling stations. Shots fired at a military patrol. One soldier killed in attack on a sixth polling station. Retaliatory attacks by government security forces result in at least four deaths and the burning of about 100 shops and dwellings in Jaffna.</i>
<i>1 June</i>	<i>Terrorists kill two Air Force men in Vavuniya bazaar. Two terrorists captured.</i>
<i>4 June</i>	<i>Tamil militants assassinate unsuccessful UNP candidate in recent elections in an execution-style slaying.</i>
<i>11 June</i>	<i>Two bombs thrown at house of a Tamil member of parliament in Trincomalee. Other bombs reported 13 June. Curfew put in effect.</i>
<i>27 June-1 July</i>	<i>Scattered bombings/incidents in Trincomalee result in 14 dead and over 100 injured. Considerable property damage. Curfew reinstated. Over 300 suspects under arrest.</i>
<i>1 July</i>	<i>Jaffna-Colombo train destroyed by Tigers.</i>



25X1

active pursuit of suspected terrorists. According to press reports, however, the government acknowledges shortcomings in antiterrorist operations and plans to revamp its security organization to emphasize intelligence gathering and better cooperation among the services 

in mid-June on an official visit, the President took the unusual step of appointing Prime Minister Premadasa as acting Defense Minister in order to give him direct control of the security apparatus while the communal situation remains tense. 

25X1

25X1

In several recent speeches Jayewardene has pledged to eliminate terrorism and has called upon opposition parties to help combat it. Prior to leaving the country

The government's use of extraordinary security measures has helped curtail terrorism, but it has also

further soured Tamil attitudes toward Colombo. The stringent provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in particular have become a major rallying point for antigovernment protest within the Tamil community, which complains that the law has been used to arrest and detain without charge a number of prominent Tamils under the guise of combating Tiger activities. [redacted]

Sri Lankan police campaigns against the Tigers have been least successful in Jaffna District, the major Tamil stronghold in the north, where the largely Sinhalese security forces are widely regarded as an army of occupation. Because of widespread antigovernment dissidence among the general Tamil population, security forces have received little public cooperation in their efforts to track down suspected terrorists. The frustration of chasing an elusive enemy occasionally erupts into indiscriminant violence against the general Tamil population by the military. [redacted]

The Dangers of Sinhalese Backlash

Jayewardene and his government are increasingly coming under fire from the majority Sinhalese community for not taking a harder line against Tamil terrorism, according to press reports. When communal tensions are high, a single, well-executed terrorist attack can provoke a strong Sinhalese overreaction, and the government has lately become concerned about growing indiscipline in the Army. In several recent incidents, security forces have gone on the rampage when one of their members has fallen victim to the Tigers. In one case a suspected terrorist died of injuries received while in Army custody, presumably the victim of a beating. [redacted]

We believe that such indiscipline in the security forces tends to encourage both the Tamil and Sinhalese communities to look to their own resources for protection and vengeance. The perception on both sides that security elements had lost their impartiality was a major factor in widespread communal tension and bloodshed in 1981. The government clearly fears a similar outbreak and has moved swiftly to restore discipline. [redacted]

The Indian Connection

We believe that many Sinhalese government officials suspect that the Indians have been less than cooperative with Colombo's antiterrorism efforts, although President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Gandhi would probably move swiftly to prevent the issue from seriously damaging bilateral relations. [redacted]

Perceived Indian indifference and the ready availability of Indian sanctuary complicate Colombo's antiterrorism efforts and could become a political issue. A shootout in Madras in May 1982 between rival Tiger groups resulted in the arrests by Indian police of several prominent militants wanted by Sri Lankan authorities. Colombo immediately pressed for their extradition, but the Indians demurred, claiming that no extradition treaty existed and that the terrorists were to be held for trial in Madras. In April 1983, however, two of them jumped bail while awaiting Indian justice and may have made their way back to Sri Lanka. [redacted]

Outlook

Jayewardene's best hope of defusing communal tensions and curbing Tiger violence in the near term probably lies in strengthening the position of the TULF through a resumption of direct talks and at least the appearance of movement in addressing Tamil grievances. Having won reelection both for himself and for his government last fall, Jayewardene should have the political strength to combine a tough line toward terrorist activity with a more moderate attitude toward legitimate Tamil demands for the devolution of power. [redacted]

We believe that the Tigers will continue to seize opportunities to poison Tamil-Sinhalese relations through attacks on security forces and politicians of both camps. Their success in reducing voter turnout in May may encourage them to test their strength again soon. The next period of significant Tiger activity could come in early August if the TULF decides to follow through with its threat to resign its 18 seats in parliament as the new six-year term begins. This would necessitate a new round of byelections that would be held exclusively in the north and would be vulnerable to Tiger disruption. [redacted]

[redacted]